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National Foreign Assessment Center

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Latin America Review

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Argentina: Disagreements Among Military

Disagreements among components of Argentina's ruling military junta are delaying progress on the formulation of a national political plan, as well as the promulgation of key labor and social welfare laws. Some major differences are likely to remain unresolved for months, until changes in the Army hierarchy and the issue of presidential succession are decided. 3.5(c)

Attempts by committees of each of the three military services to produce a joint program for military rule at least through 1984 and for eventual civilian participation in the government now appear hopelessly bogged down. The three services reportedly are unanimous in wanting a permanent, institutionalized role for the military in government, but beyond that there is little agreement. 3.5(c)

No consensus has yet emerged among the three-man military junta on the sharing of power among the three services following President Videla's term, which ends in 1981. The Army is seeking greater control of the government, while the Navy and Air Force prefer to maintain the status quo, in which power--at least on paper--is equally shared. 3.5(c)

Also at issue is the role that existing political parties will play in any future government. The Army reportedly believes that these political groupings should play a part. The Air Force wants the old parties abolished and a new independent national political movement set up. The Navy is said to be considering the creation of a new liberal, nationalistic party representing industrialists, trade unions, and some remnants of existing political groups--all united by a broad social democratic ideology. 3.5(c)

It now appears likely that only a general set of principles for governing may emerge from deliberations in the individual service committees. Once these

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principles are approved by the junta, probably not before the end of the year, President Videla may be empowered to use them as a form of reference for drafting a detailed government proposal and timetable for a return to constitutional rule. Such a plan, which probably will be strongly influenced by future changes in the military's political leadership, may not be completed until the end of Videla's term. 3.5(c)

Although there seems to be broad agreement among the military that the government must sharply curtail the political and economic power traditionally held by the Peronist-dominated trade unions, there are important differences over the instrumentalities to be used. Government officials have labored without success for many months to produce an acceptable new "professional associations" law and a social benefits law to achieve this end. 3.5(c)

The Navy wants to remove all central union authority, thus putting an end to national-level union control of social welfare funds. Under the Navy-sponsored plan, the funds would be administered by the Social Welfare Ministry, which the Navy itself runs. The Army hopes to retain some form of central union authority, but backs a Ministry of Economy proposal that calls for private control of welfare services. President Videla, not wanting to offend the Navy by endorsing the Army-backed plan outright, apparently has asked the junta to reconcile the two proposals. 3.5(c)

Army commander and junta member General Viola, regarded by most insiders as the likely successor to President Videla in 1981, presently is orchestrating changes in the national trade union leadership that will both isolate the Peronists and provide a civilian base of political support for his own future presidency. Viola reportedly is opposed to both social welfare plans now under consideration and may seek to obtain less stringent labor and social benefits laws in exchange for labor's political support. 3.5(c)

The key to Viola's chances of acceding to the presidency will be his ability to force potential presidential rivals in the Army hierarchy into retirement and to maneuver loyal supporters into top Army positions during the 1979 promotion and retirement cycle, which comes at the end of the year.

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Up to now Viola has succeeded in neutralizing such hardline opponents as Army Chief of Staff Suarez Mason and Third Corps Commander Menendez. Any heating up of the Beagle Channel issue with Chile, now being mediated by the Vatican, or serious labor unrest over continued high inflation before the end of the year could, however, shift the balance of power in the Army and upset Viola's political calculations. 3.5(c)

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